MARVEL COMICS
THE DEATH OF VERMIN
CONCLUSION!
the SPECTACULAR SPIDER-MAN
$1.25 US
$1.60 CAN
196
JAN
UK 85p
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30TH ANNIVERSARY 1962 1992
THE AMAZING SPIDER-MAN

BITTEN BY A RADIOACTIVE SPIDER, STUDENT PETER PARKER GAINED THE PROPORTIONATE STRENGTH AND AGILITY OF AN ARACHNID! ARMED WITH HIS WONDROUS WEB-SHOOTERS, THE RELUCTANT SUPER HERO STRUGGLES WITH SINISTER SUPER-VILLAINS, MAKING ENDS MEET, AND MAINTAINING SOME SEMBLANCE OF A NORMAL LIFE!

Stan Lee PRESENTS: THE SPECTACULAR SPIDER-MAN!™

The DEATH of VERMIN, PART THREE
Faces
YOU HAVE THREE SECONDS LEFT TO RELEASE ME, SPIDER-MAN. THREE SECONDS-- AND THEN VERMIN--
--EATS THE WOMAN ALIVE.
Those eyes: I'd never seen them so devoid of humanity. Even at his worst, Vermin--with me, at least--had a quality that offset his bestial nature.
Something of Edward always managed to break through.
But that night--it was as if the man within had simply... died. Only the rat remained.
And I know that rat would have cut my heart out and consumed it... without a thought.

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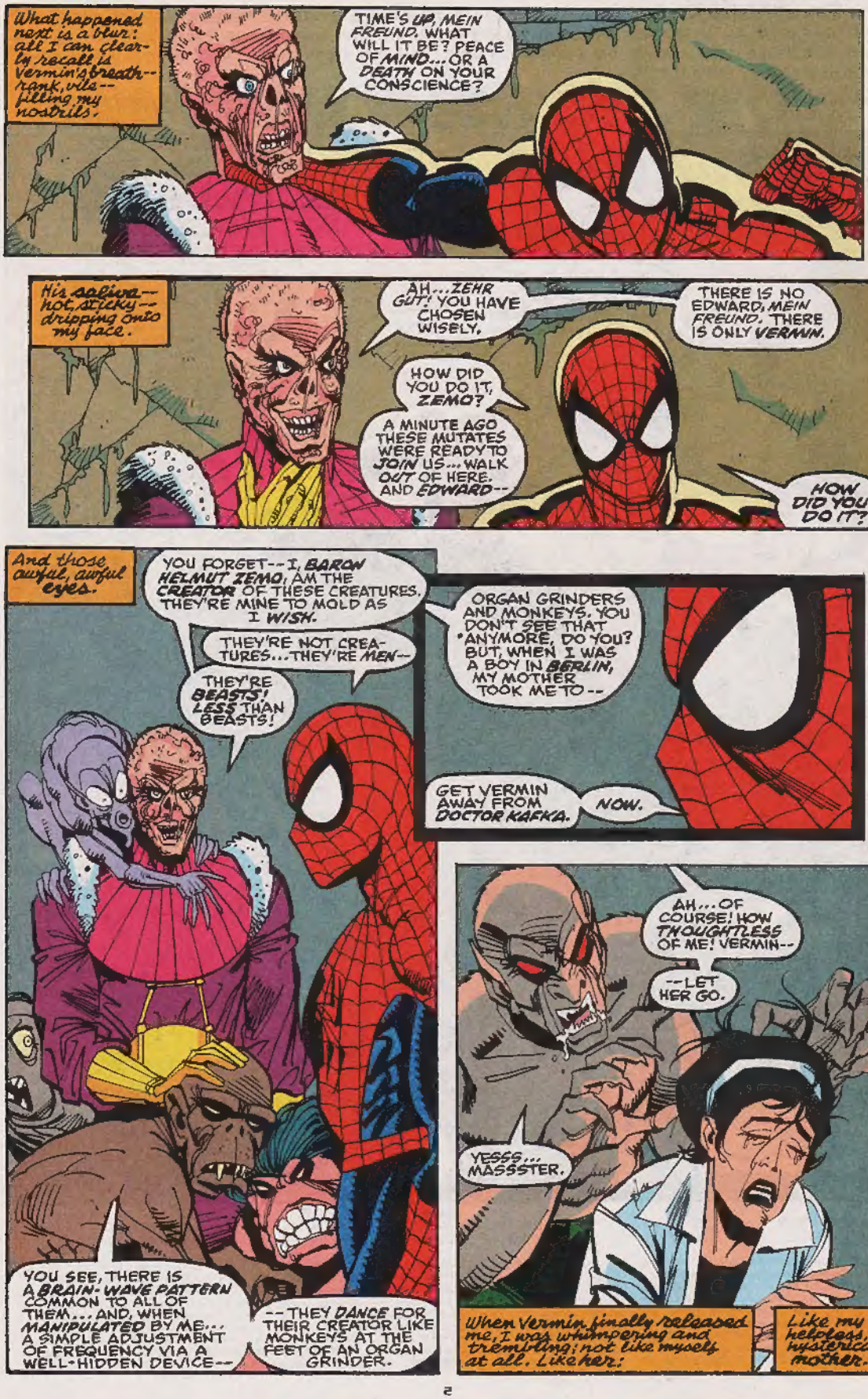
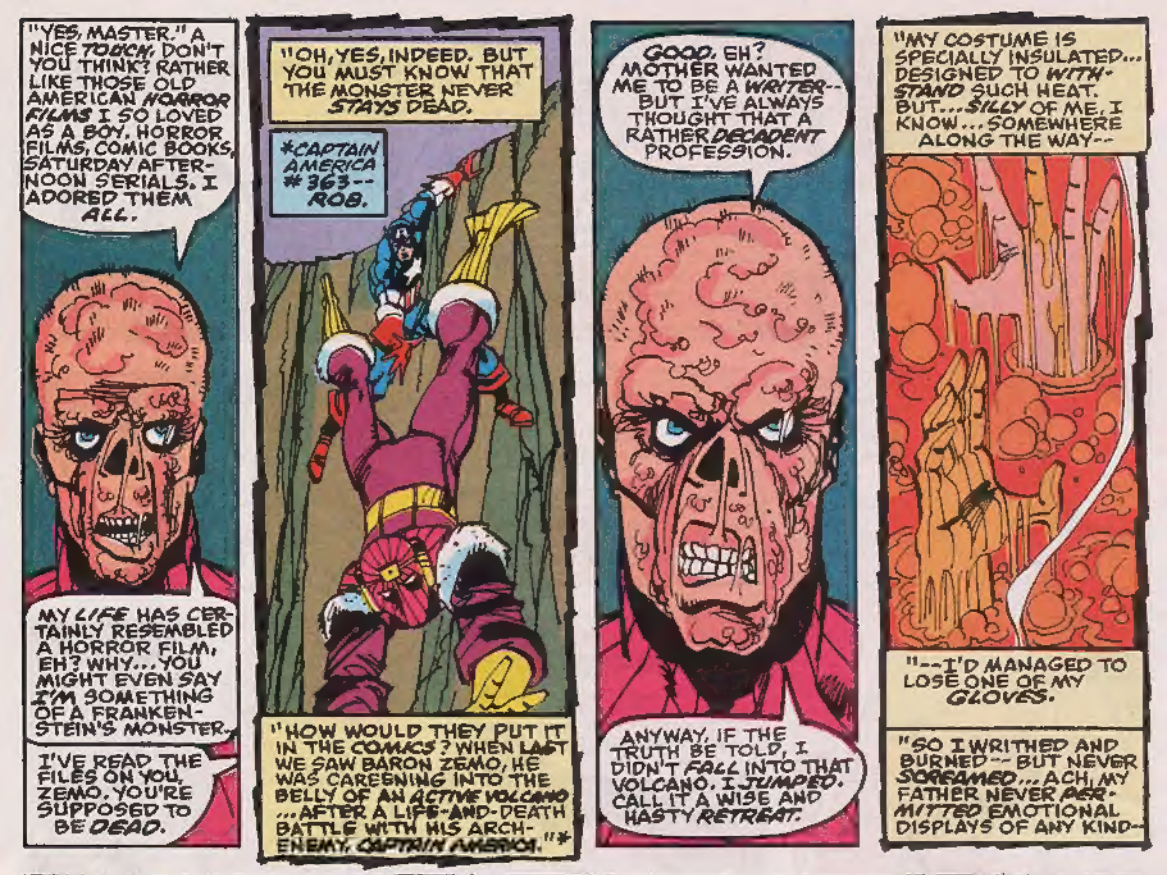
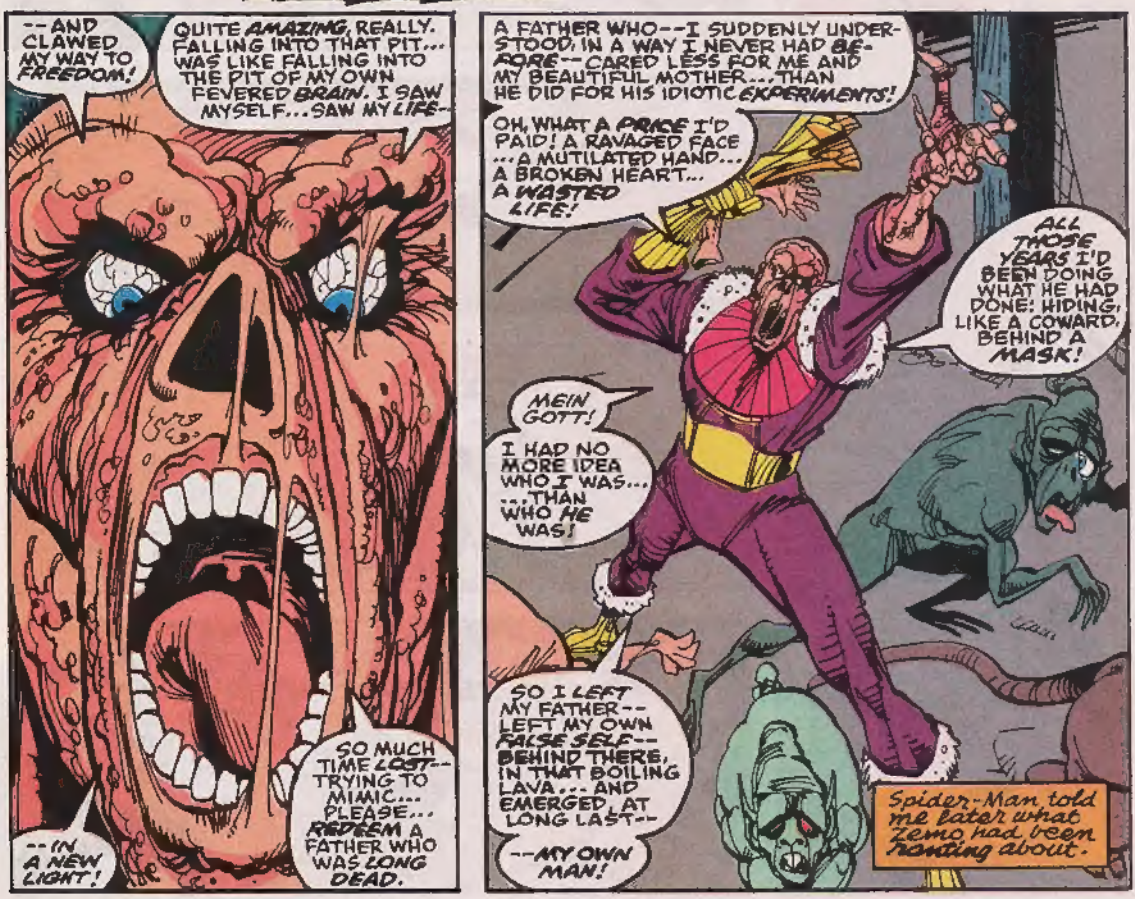
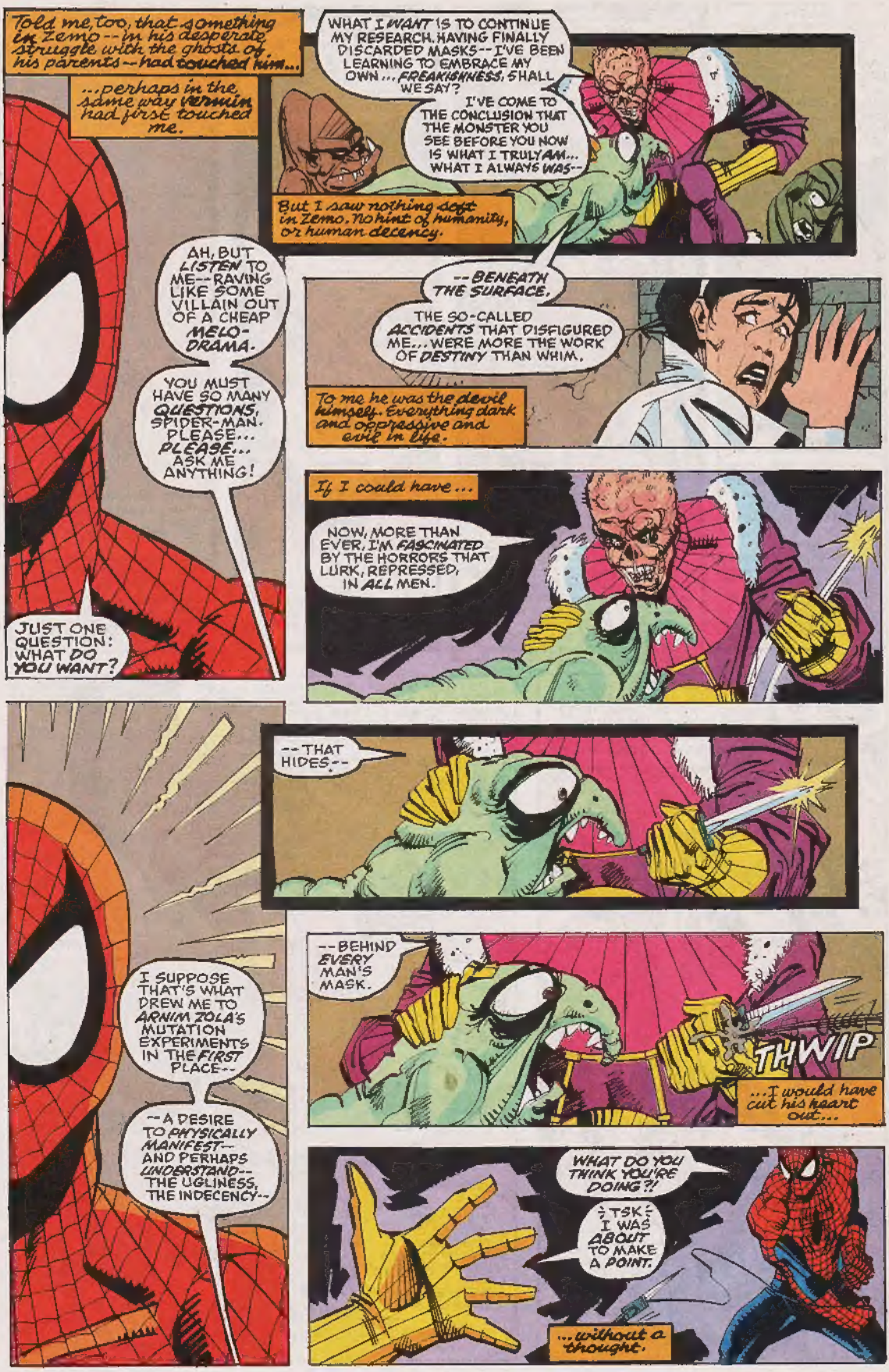
THE SPECTACULAR SPIDER-MAN™ Vol. 1, No. 196, January, 1993. (ISSN #0898-1833) Published by MARVEL COMICS, Terry Stewart, President. Stan Lee, Publisher. Michael Hobson, Group Vice President, Publishing. OFFICE OF PUBLICATION: 387 PARK AVENUE SOUTH, NEW YORK, N.Y. 10016. SECOND CLASS POSTAGE PAID AT NEW YORK, NY AND AT ADDITIONAL MAILING OFFICES. Published monthly. Copyright © 1992 by Marvel Entertainment Group, Inc. All rights reserved. Price $1.25 per copy in the U.S. and $1.60 in Canada. Subscription rate for 12 issues: $15.00 U.S., Canadian subscribers must add $8.00 for postage and GST. GST #R127032852. Foreign; $27.00. No similarity between any of the names, characters, persons, and/or institutions in this magazine with those of any living or dead person or institution is intended, and any such similarity which may exist is purely coincidental. This periodical may not be sold except by authorized dealers and is sold subject to the condition that it shall not be sold or distributed with any part of its cover or markings removed, nor in a mutilated condition. THE SPECTACULAR SPIDER-MAN (including all prominent characters featured in this issue and the distinctive likenesses thereof) is a trademark of MARVEL ENTERTAINMENT GROUP, INC. POSTMASTER: SEND ADDRESS CHANGES TO SPECTACULAR SPIDER-MAN, c/o MARVEL COMICS, 9TH FLOOR, 387 PARK AVENUE SOUTH, NEW YORK, N.Y. 10016. Printed in the U.S.A.


What happened next is a blur: all I can clearly recall is Vermin's breath--rank, vile--filling my nostrils.
TIME'S UP, MEIN FREUND. WHAT WILL IT BE? PEACE OF MIND... OR A DEATH ON YOUR CONSCIENCE?
His saliva--hot, sticky--dripping onto my face.
AH... ZEHR GUT! YOU HAVE CHOSEN WISELY.
THERE IS NO EDWARD, MEIN FREUND. THERE IS ONLY VERMIN.
HOW DID YOU DO IT, ZEMO?
A MINUTE AGO THESE MUTATES WERE READY TO JOIN US... WALK OUT OF HERE. AND EDWARD--
HOW DID YOU DO IT?
And those awful, awful eyes.
YOU FORGET--I, BARON HELMUT ZEMO, AM THE CREATOR OF THESE CREATURES. THEY'RE MINE TO MOLD AS I WISH.
THEY'RE NOT CREATURES... THEY'RE MEN--
THEY'RE BEASTS! LESS THAN BEASTS!
ORGAN GRINDERS AND MONKEYS. YOU DON'T SEE THAT ANYMORE, DO YOU? BUT, WHEN I WAS A BOY IN BERLIN, MY MOTHER TOOK ME TO--
GET VERMIN AWAY FROM DOCTOR KAFKA.
NOW.
YOU SEE, THERE IS A BRAIN-WAVE PATTERN COMMON TO ALL OF THEM... AND, WHEN MANIPULATED BY ME... A SIMPLE ADJUSTMENT OF FREQUENCY VIA A WELL-HIDDEN DEVICE--
--THEY DANCE FOR THEIR CREATOR LIKE MONKEYS AT THE FEET OF AN ORGAN GRINDER.
AH... OF COURSE! HOW THOUGHTLESS OF ME! VERMIN--
--LET HER GO.
YESSS... MASSSTER.
When Vermin finally released me, I was whimpering and trembling; not like myself at all. Like her:
Like my helpless, hysterical mother.


"YES, MASTER." A NICE TOUCH, DON'T YOU THINK? RATHER LIKE THOSE OLD AMERICAN HORROR FILMS I SO LOVED AS A BOY. HORROR FILMS, COMIC BOOKS, SATURDAY AFTERNOON SERIALS. I ADORED THEM ALL.
MY LIFE HAS CERTAINLY RESEMBLED A HORROR FILM, EH? WHY... YOU MIGHT EVEN SAY I'M SOMETHING OF A FRANKENSTEIN'S MONSTER.
I'VE READ THE FILES ON YOU, ZEMO. YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO BE DEAD.
"OH, YES, INDEED. BUT YOU MUST KNOW THAT THE MONSTER NEVER STAYS DEAD.
*CAPTAIN AMERICA #363-- ROB.
"HOW WOULD THEY PUT IT IN THE COMICS? WHEN LAST WE SAW BARON ZEMO, HE WAS CAREENING INTO THE BELLY OF AN ACTIVE VOLCANO ...AFTER A LIFE-AND-DEATH BATTLE WITH HIS ARCH-ENEMY, CAPTAIN AMERICA! "*
GOOD, EH? MOTHER WANTED ME TO BE A WRITER-- BUT I'VE ALWAYS THOUGHT THAT A RATHER DECADENT PROFESSION.
ANYWAY, IF THE TRUTH BE TOLD, I DIDN'T FALL INTO THAT VOLCANO. I JUMPED. CALL IT A WISE AND HASTY RETREAT.
"MY COSTUME IS SPECIALLY INSULATED... DESIGNED TO WITHSTAND SUCH HEAT. BUT... SILLY OF ME, I KNOW... SOMEWHERE ALONG THE WAY--
"--I'D MANAGED TO LOSE ONE OF MY GLOVES.
"SO I WRITHED AND BURNED-- BUT NEVER SCREAMED... ACH, MY FATHER NEVER PERMITTED EMOTIONAL DISPLAYS OF ANY KIND--


--AND CLAWED MY WAY TO FREEDOM!
QUITE AMAZING, REALLY. FALLING INTO THAT PIT... WAS LIKE FALLING INTO THE PIT OF MY OWN FEVERED BRAIN. I SAW MYSELF... SAW MY LIFE--
--IN A NEW LIGHT!
SO MUCH TIME LOST-- TRYING TO MIMIC... PLEASE... REDEEM A FATHER WHO WAS LONG DEAD.
A FATHER WHO--I SUDDENLY UNDERSTOOD, IN A WAY I NEVER HAD BEFORE-- CARED LESS FOR ME AND MY BEAUTIFUL MOTHER... THAN HE DID FOR HIS IDIOTIC EXPERIMENTS!
OH, WHAT A PRICE I'D PAID! A RAVAGED FACE ...A MUTILATED HAND... A BROKEN HEART... A WASTED LIFE!
ALL THOSE YEARS I'D BEEN DOING WHAT HE HAD DONE: HIDING, LIKE A COWARD, BEHIND A MASK!
MEIN GOTT!
I HAD NO MORE IDEA WHO I WAS... ...THAN WHO HE WAS!
SO I LEFT MY FATHER-- LEFT MY OWN FALSE SELF-- BEHIND THERE, IN THAT BOILING LAVA... AND EMERGED AT LONG LAST--
--MY OWN MAN!
Spider-Man told me later what Zemo had been ranting about.


Told me, too, that something in Zemo--in his desperate struggle with the ghosts of his parents--had touched him...
...perhaps in the same way Vermin had first touched me.
WHAT I WANT IS TO CONTINUE MY RESEARCH. HAVING FINALLY DISCARDED MASKS--I'VE BEEN LEARNING TO EMBRACE MY OWN... FREAKISHNESS, SHALL WE SAY?
I'VE COME TO THE CONCLUSION THAT THE MONSTER YOU SEE BEFORE YOU NOW IS WHAT I TRULY AM... WHAT I ALWAYS WAS--
But I saw nothing soft in Zemo. No hint of humanity, or human decency.
AH, BUT LISTEN TO ME--RAVING LIKE SOME VILLAIN OUT OF A CHEAP MELO-DRAMA.
YOU MUST HAVE SO MANY QUESTIONS, SPIDER-MAN. PLEASE... PLEASE... ASK ME ANYTHING!
JUST ONE QUESTION: WHAT DO YOU WANT?
--BENEATH THE SURFACE.
THE SO-CALLED ACCIDENTS THAT DISFIGURED ME... WERE MORE THE WORK OF DESTINY THAN WHIM.
To me he was the devil himself. Everything dark and oppressive and evil in life.
If I could have...
NOW, MORE THAN EVER, I'M FASCINATED BY THE HORRORS THAT LURK, REPRESSED, IN ALL MEN.
--THAT HIDES--
I SUPPOSE THAT'S WHAT DREW ME TO ARNIM ZOLA'S MUTATION EXPERIMENTS IN THE FIRST PLACE--
--A DESIRE TO PHYSICALLY MANIFEST--AND PERHAPS UNDERSTAND--THE UGLINESS, THE INDECENCY--
--BEHIND EVERY MAN'S MASK.
THWIP
...I would have cut his heart out...
WHAT DO YOU THINK YOU'RE DOING?!
TSK TSK I WAS ABOUT TO MAKE A POINT.
...without a thought.

BULLPEN BULLETINS

MARVEL COMICS

STAN'S SOAPBOX

Hi, Heroes!

What good's a Soapbox if it isn't used to tell you things you didn't know? I'll bet few of you were aware that mighty Marvel's sensational sister company across the sea, Marvel Comics U.K. (U.K. standing for United Kingdom, of course) has taken the once-staid British populace by storm with the creation of a pulse-pounding plethora of startling new super heroes, featured in England's own cosmic collection of costumed crusaders — the now-legendary best-seller — OVERKILL!

But, since few True Believers are able to fly to England each fortnight to pick up the latest editions, your big-hearted Bullpen has solved the problem for you! We've arranged to ship most of Marvel U.K.'s titanic new titles to your favorite comicbook stores in America! No longer shall we underprivileged colonials be deprived of the mother country's harvest of heroes! And what a caravansary of cataclysmic characters they are! Just the briefest listing of their titles should give you an inkling of the wonderment in store ...

Zooming to the U.S. at the end of '92 you'll meet DEATH'S HEAD II, MOTOR-MOUTH & KILLPOWER, THE KNIGHTS OF PENDRAGON, DIGITEK, BATTLE-TIDE (the senses-staggering battle between Death's Head II and Killpower), WARHEADS, DARK ANGEL, TEAM HELIX, and NIGHTRAVEN!

But that's only the beginning of Britain's super hero invasion! Early in '93 don't miss the way-out wonderment of MYSTECH WARS, DEATH RATTLE, SHADOW RIDERS, BLOOD SEED, GENE MACHINE, WILD THING, BLACK-AXE, SUPER SOLDIERS, GUN RUNNER, DEATH METAL, and the mind-blasting mystery of — PLASMER!

Perhaps the most spectacular surprise of all is the fact that the entire kaboodle of British heroes meet, greet, and interact with your own favorites from Marvel U.S.A.! So don't be surprised to see Wolverine and Sabretooth pop up in Battletide's limited-series, or to find Warheads, Mephisto and the Silver Surfer sharing the same adventures! As always, the Marvel Universe is one and inseparable, so anything happening anywhere affects all else in our ever-constant, ever-changing cosmos!

'Tis with happy heart and cheerful mien that I bid thee adieu, buoyed by the knowledge that the incalculable power of this month's Soapbox has insured that thou shalt not miss the triumphant entry of Marvel U.K.'s horde of heroes to our grand and grateful shores!

Excelsior!

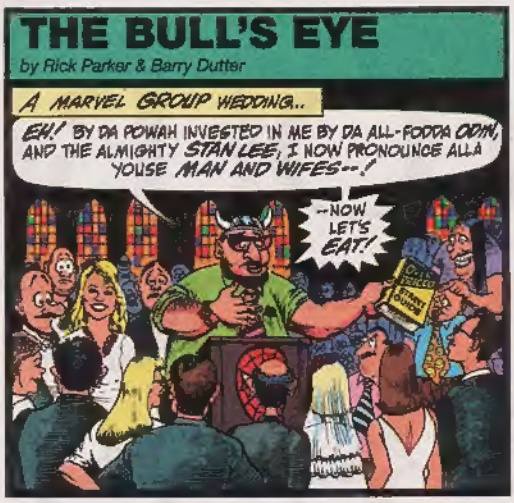
Stan

Stan Lee

Everybody's doin' it! No, we're not talking about hologram covers — we're talking about gettin' hitched. Takin' the plunge. Checkin' into the matrimonial institution. Doin' the marriage thing.

Lately there have been a rash of weddings among the editorial staff of Mighty Marvel — they've been popping up like zits on a New Warrior. Following in the footsteps of Reed and Sue ... Peter and Mary Jane ... Dr. Octopus and Aunt May ... many of our mighty Marveloids have decided to pursue lives of wedded bliss. Tieing the knot is a big commitment — it's like when Hercules quits his job as a solo hero and becomes an Avenger.

One editor who is solo no longer is Associate Editor **Evan Skolnick**, who this past July said "I do" to his own British import, **Lynn White**, after a whirlwind three month courtship. In addition to his recent nuptials, Evan was recently promoted to Associate Editor of such titles of ORIGINAL GHOST RIDER and MARVEL YEAR IN REVIEW. Sounds like he'll have quite a year of his own to review.


THE BULL'S EYE
by Rick Parker & Barry Dutter
A MARVEL GROUP WEDDING..
EH! BY DA POWAH INVESTED IN ME BY DA ALL-FODDA ODIN, AND THE ALMIGHTY STAN LEE, I NOW PRONOUNCE ALLA YOUSE MAN AND WIFES--!
--NOW LET'S EAT!

Evan's former boss, **Fabian Nicieza**, writer of NOMAD, last month gave up his life of wandering as he settled down and married his longtime sweetheart, **Tracey Lee**. It only took *twelve years* for Fabe to make that decision — that's one heck of a deadline! Fabe's brother, **Mariano**, of the Promotions Department, threw a blowout bachelor party for fabulous Fabe, which featured a special mega-entertaining slideshow of "The Lives and Time of Fabian." It was attended by many of the brightest and best guys (no girls allowed, natch) in the business.

Fabian's NOMAD editor **Glenn** "Helium" **Herdling** seems to have found religion. Not only is he writing PARAGON for our new religious comics line, but he also was made an honest man last month by his new bride, **Laura Eckhardt**. Glenn took his lady love up in a balloon, and popped the question — but not the balloon, fortunately. Glenn's proposal first appeared in comic book form in WHAT IF #31. Glenn presented Laura with a copy of the comic while up in the balloon, and she answered in the affirmative quicker than Tom DeFalco approving a new Thor series.

Still waiting for approval for that Quasar/Ren & Stimpy team-up is **Mark Gruenwald**, who also slipped the quantum band around the finger of his new bride, **Catherine Schulier**, last month. Performing at Mark's wedding was WOLVERINE writer **Larry Hama**'s band, the K-Otics! Mark and Catherine's wedding song was "One More Kiss," from the movie *Bladerunner*! (Now if only we could make a *replicant* of Mark, we could get twice as much work out of him!)

Bullpen cartoonist **Rick Parker**, still basking in the success of his best-selling book with **Barry Dutter**, *Everything I Really Need to Know I learned From Television*, also walked down the aisle last month with BARBIE writer **Lisa Trusiani** at a ceremony in Falmouth, Maine. The reception included a good old New England style clambake, and all the guests were treated to a cruise on lovely Casco Bay. Unfortunately, the Love Boat's Captain Stubing was unavailable to perform the wedding ceremony.

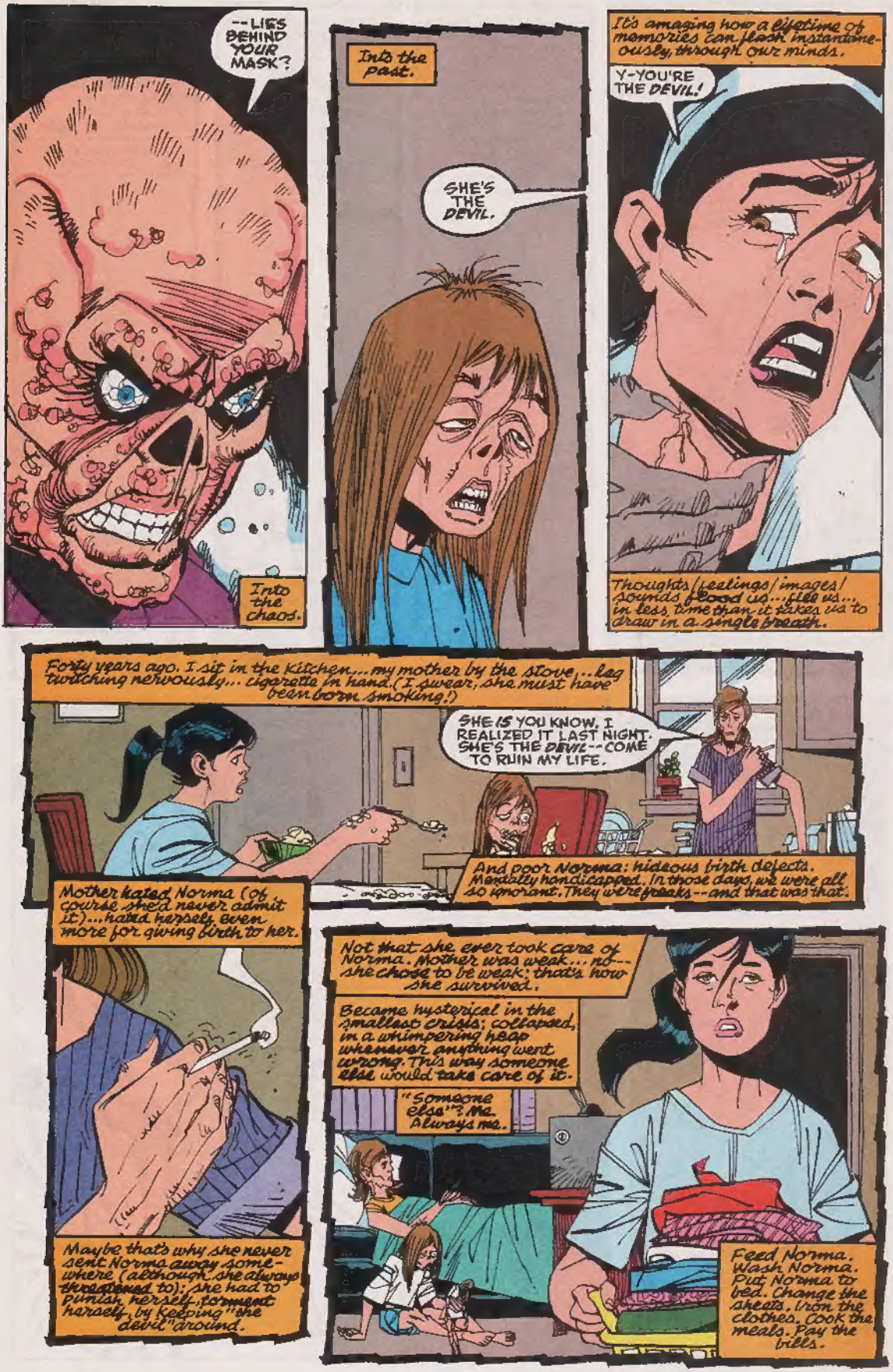
Sadly, Pin-Head of the Cenobites, doesn't do weddings, either. Pin-Head's boss, HELLRAISER editor **Marcus McLaurin**, is used to seeing souls torn apart over in the pages of that mag. But MM will take part in the joining of two souls when he exchanges vows with his intended, **Janet Paes**, next May. Marcus proposed to Janet on the Sky Ride at Disneyworld last January. Surely this wedding will be an Epic event, though hopefully not a harrowing one. (Or are we Barkering up the wrong tree?)

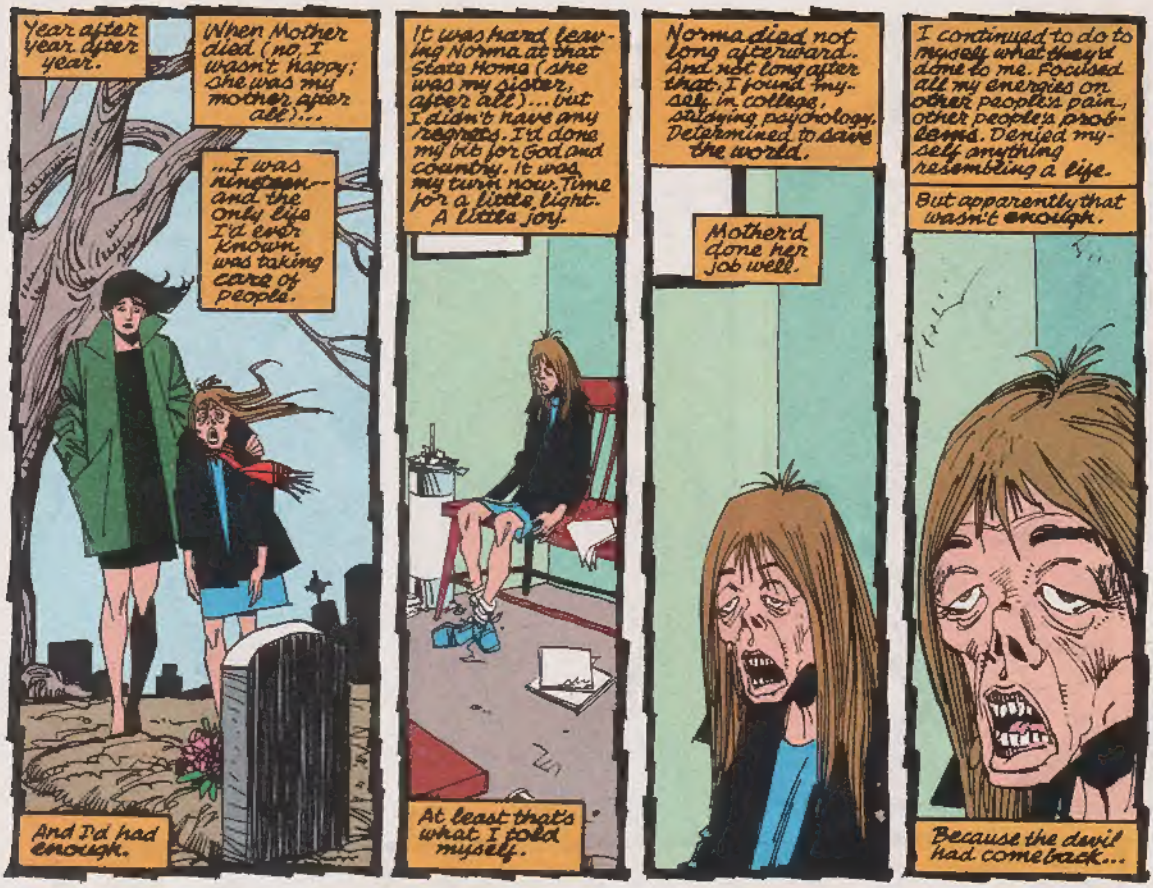
Finally, we come to HULK editor **Bobbie Chase**, whose gamma-irradiated nuptials will be taking place next June. **Craig Kunaschk**, of the Direct Sales Department, proposed to Bobbie at the top of a mountain in St.Maartin while the two were on vacation. It is hoped that their union will bring Marvel's editorial and sales departments closer together, and bring even greater unity to the Marvel family. Surely it won't be long before Bobbie and Craig will have little Midnight Sons and Daughters of their own running around all over the place.

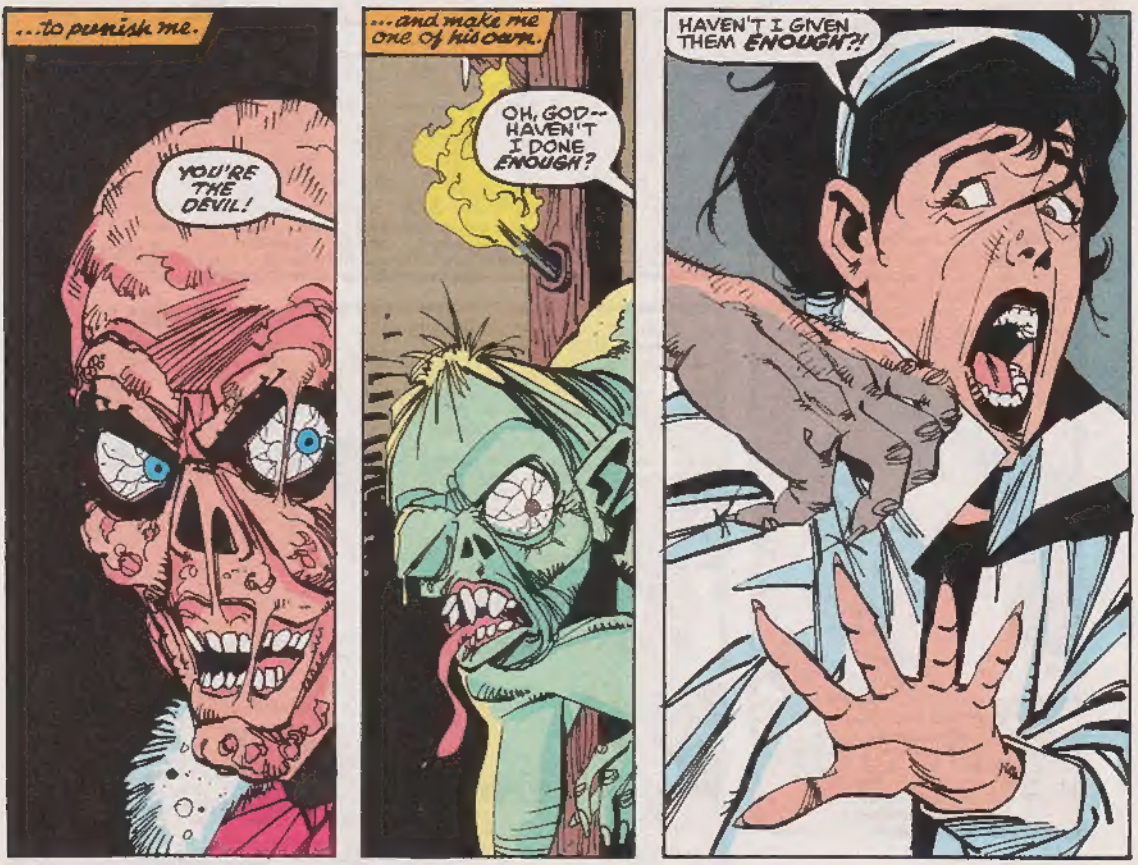
Warmest wedding wishes to all our newlyweds! And remember the lesson learned by Spider-Man not so long ago: With great weddings come great catering bills!

LEVEL METAPHORICAL COMPANIONS DRACULA CON- BULLPEN BONDERLINE BLATHER VERTIGINAL WISDOM HUBBLE CONSTANT STATE OF

Cut his heart out?
A POINT?!
BY STICKING A KNIFE IN HIM?!
Me? The therapist who's always being criticized for getting too close to her patients? For feeling their pain more deeply than their own?
NOT HIM, /T. YOU'RE UNDER THE FALSE IMPRESSION THAT MY MUTATES ARE MEN AND WOMEN. ONCE, LONG AGO, THEY WERE.
BUT NOW-- JUST... GUINEA PIGS. FODDER FOR MY EXPERIMENTS.
ZEMO--!
UH-UH-UH! REMEMBER-- ONE WORD FROM ME... AND THE WOMAN DIES. BESIDES--
--I SIMPLY DON'T SEE WHAT ALL THE BOTHER IS. I HAVE NO INTEREST IN EITHER YOU OR THE DOCTOR. LET ME COLLECT MY PROPERTY AND LEAVE--
--AND WE CAN ALL FORGET THIS LITTLE INCIDENT.
What was happening to me? Controlling chaos was my profession. But what precious little control I had was crumbling.
NO! NEVER! I WON'T ALLOW IT!
OH, PLEASE-- AS IF I NEED YOUR PERMISSION!
no walls, no ceilings, just...
HMMM. I THINK PERHAPS I WILL TAKE THE GOOD DOCTOR WITH ME.
Falling.
I COULD DO TO HER-- WHAT I ONCE DID TO A BRILLIANT YOUNG SCIENTIST NAMED EDWARD WHELAN.
HIS PSYCHE WAS SHELTERING A MAN-RAT. A CANNIBAL.
Falling.
I WONDER, DOCTOR KAFKA, WHAT MONSTER--


--LIES BEHIND YOUR MASK?
Into the chaos.
Into the past.
SHE'S THE DEVIL.
It's amazing how a lifetime of memories can flash instantaneously through our minds.
Y-YOU'RE THE DEVIL!
Thoughts/feelings/images/sounds flood us...fill us... in less time than it takes us to draw in a single breath.
Forty years ago. I sit in the kitchen... my mother by the stove... leg twitching nervously... cigarette in hand. (I swear, she must have been born smoking!)
SHE IS YOU KNOW. I REALIZED IT LAST NIGHT. SHE'S THE DEVIL--COME TO RUIN MY LIFE.
And poor Norma: hideous birth defects. Mentally handicapped. In those days, we were all so ignorant. They were freaks--and that was that.
Mother hated Norma (of course she'd never admit it)...hated herself, even more for giving birth to her.
Maybe that's why she never sent Norma away somewhere (although she always threatened to): she had to punish herself, torment herself, by keeping "the devil" around.
Not that she ever took care of Norma. Mother was weak... no--she chose to be weak: that's how she survived.
Became hysterical in the smallest crisis; collapsed, in a whimpering heap whenever anything went wrong. This way someone else would take care of it.
"Someone else"? Me. Always me.
Feed Norma. Wash Norma. Put Norma to bed. Change the sheets. Iron the clothes. Cook the meals. Pay the bills.


Year after year after year.
When Mother died (no, I wasn't happy; she was my mother after all)...
...I was nineteen--and the only life I'd ever known was taking care of people.
And I'd had enough.
It was hard leaving Norma at that State Home (she was my sister, after all)...but I didn't have any regrets. I'd done my bit for God and country. It was my turn now. Time for a little light. A little joy.
At least that's what I told myself.
Norma died not long afterward. And not long after that, I found myself in college, studying psychology. Determined to save the world.
Mother'd done her job well.
I continued to do to myself what they'd done to me. Focused all my energies on other people's pain, other people's problems. Denied myself anything resembling a life.
But apparently that wasn't enough.
Because the devil had come back...


...to punish me.
YOU'RE THE DEVIL!
...and make me one of his own.
OH, GOD--HAVEN'T I DONE ENOUGH?
HAVEN'T I GIVEN THEM ENOUGH?!

A lifetime of bleeding for the world... of taking on their suffering and giving...giving...giving till I was empty...
SPIDER-MAN... PLEASE!
LET HIM TAKE THE &#@& MONSTERS! LET HIM TAKE THEM AND GO!
I CAN'T STAND IT ANYMORE! I CAN'T DO IT ANY-MORE!
...had finally come roaring up out of me. The volcano was erupting.

And so was Spider-Man.
He didn't say much about it later... I think he was embarrassed--but I can imagine what he was feeling:

To see the woman who'd taken care of him when he'd been helpless... who'd guided him through one of the worst traumas of his life*... fall apart like that--!
WHAM!
*SPEC #182. --ROB

We all like to think that there are people in our lives who are rocks: nothing disturbs them. Nothing shakes them.
ARRRR
GET OFF HER, VERMIN!
Maybe we can't handle the shocks that life throws at us...

...Oh, but they can.
FOOOM!
GET OFF!!

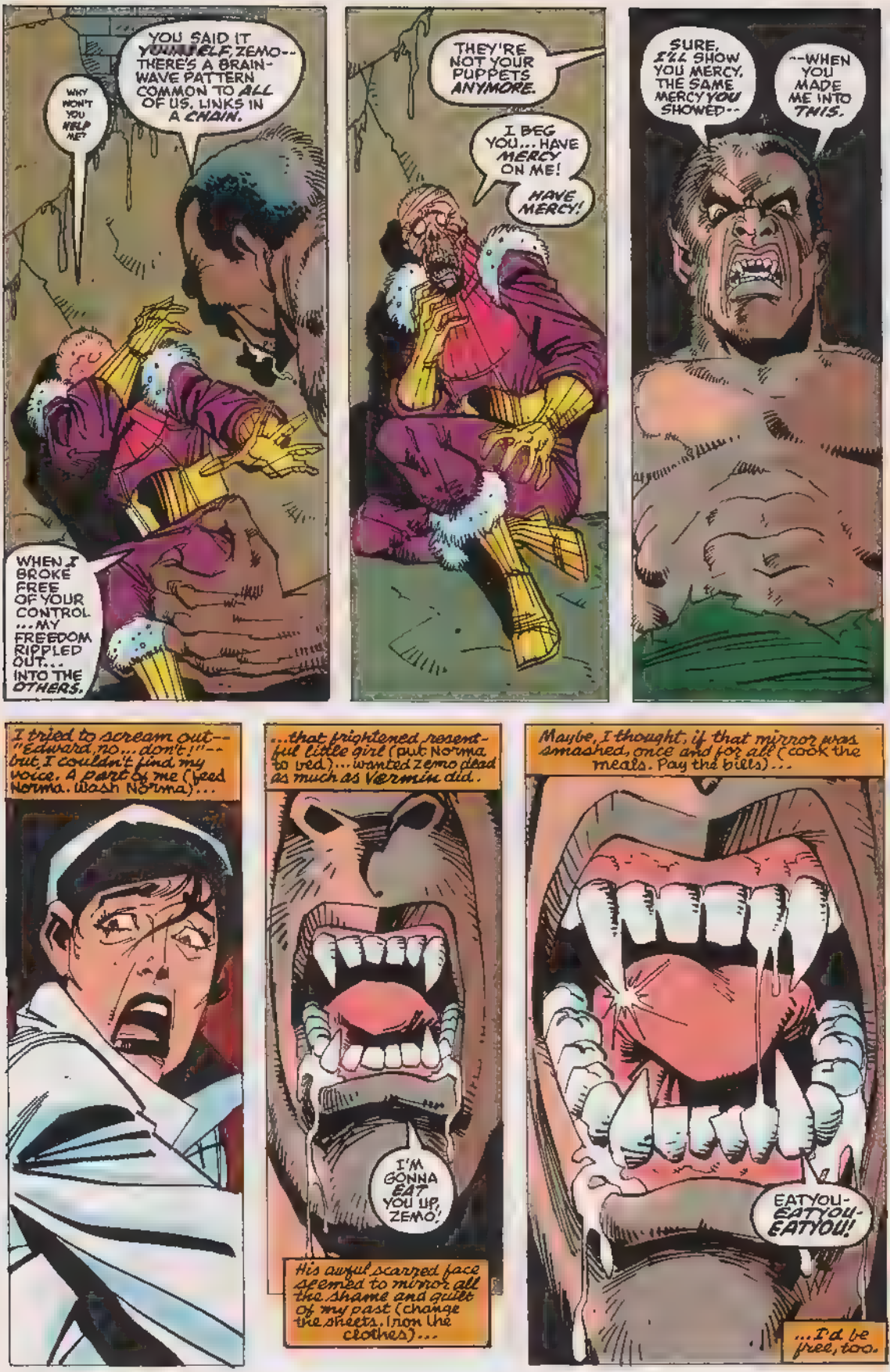
And, when we realise that these perfect people...the Problem Solvers, the Healers...have problems of their own; they can be as weak, as lost, as we are.
KRA-KOW!
SO, MY PETS--WHAT IS THIS ONE HIDING, EH?
I NEVER REALLY UNDERSTOOD THE MINDSET. THEY CALL THEMSELVES HEROES--
RAKK!
TH-
TOOM!

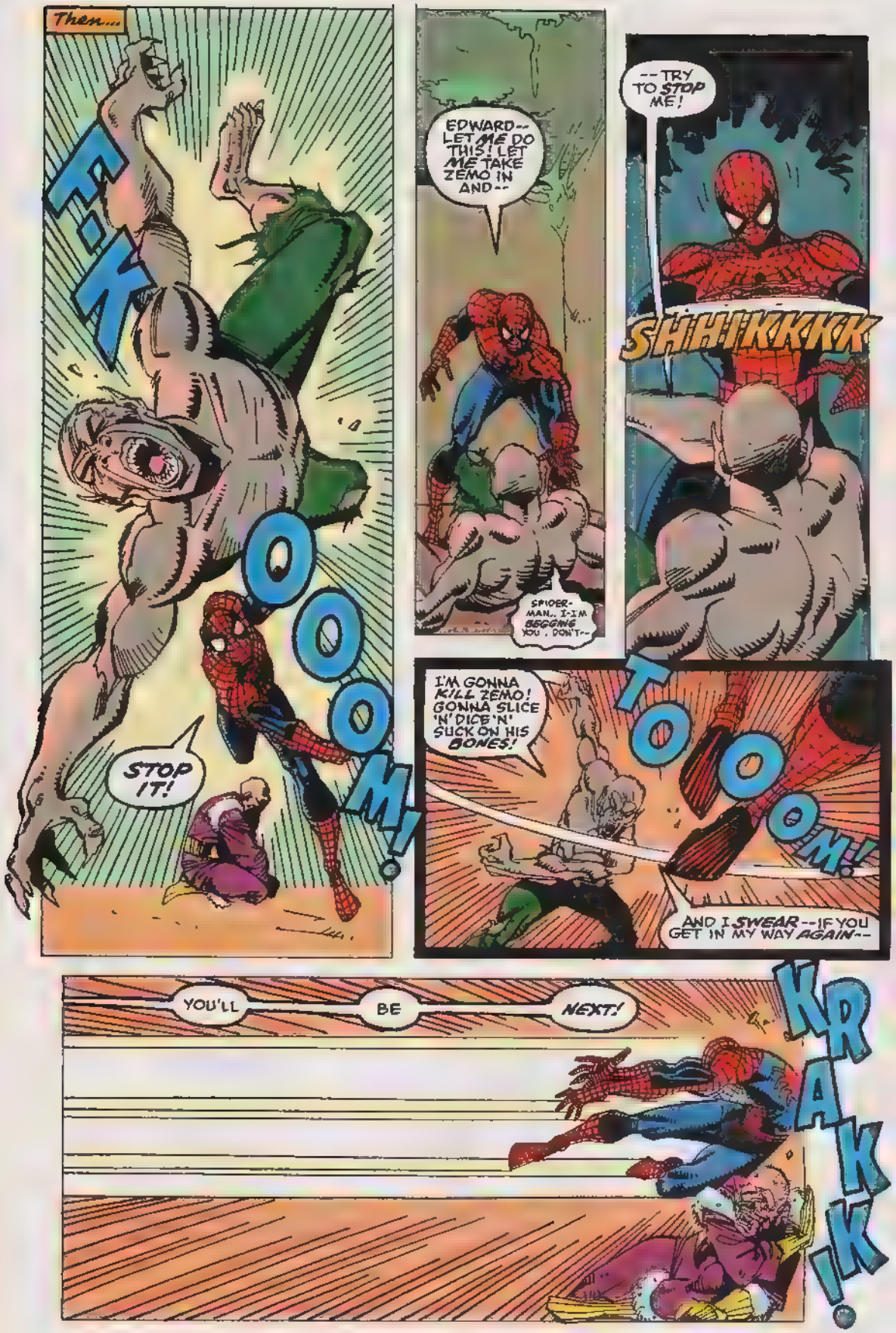
--YET THEY'RE AFRAID... PERHAPS ASHAMED... TO SHOW THEIR FACES.
LET'S FREE THE POOR SOUL OF HIS BURDEN, SHALL WE? MY DEAR MUTATES--
SKOO
OM
REMOVE HIS
MASK.
NO!
K-
THOOM!
It isn't easy.

I'VE GOT IT GOT IT! I DO I DO!
EXCELLENT.
BRING IT HERE.
BUT CAN'T I CAN'T I KEEP IT KEEP IT?
GIVE.. ME... THE MASK--
I'm always wondering what people think, analyzing what they might be feeling, in a given situation. It's a professional compulsion.
But, whenever I remember Spider-Man... beaten and bloodied... humiliated like that...

Well...some things are best left unknown.
SO THIS IS THE FACE YOU CHOOSE TO SHOW THE WORLD. THERE'S A REAL POWER, ISN'T THERE, IN PROJECTING SUCH A STRANGE AND DISTURBING VISAGE?
I CANNOT SEE--DON'T CARE TO SEE--THE FACE UNDERNEATH
WITH THIS MASK YOU BECOME LARGER-THAN-LIFE...YOU STAND ABOVE THE RABBLE. BUT THE SAD REALITY IS... THIS SECOND FACE...IS MERELY A PIECE OF CLOTH.
AND--THOUGH IT MAY PROTECT YOU FROM OTHER PEOPLE... IT CAN'T PROTECT YOU--
--FROM YOUR OWN PAIN.
OH, YES... I CAN FEEL YOUR PAIN, SPIDER-MAN. AS MUCH AS YOU'VE TRIED TO COVER IT UP... IT'S HERE... IN THE VERY FABRIC.
SUCH SADNESS BEHIND THE MASK, EH? SUCH--
TAKE IT OFF!
WHO DARES TO--
I DARE!
One more surprise in a night of surprises. As I came to understand it later, Edward had been fighting desperately, all that time, to free himself from Zemo's control.

The mutates had been imprisoned in those wretched forms for years, trapped by fear and hopelessness.
STAY BACK, VERMIN! YOUR MASTER ORDERS YOU TO--
MASTER?
But our months of therapy had given Edward a focus, a strength of will, that the others lacked.
NO MAN IS MY MASTER!
His hate for Zemo had fueled that will; helped him claw his way up to freedom.
And a hate that deep that strong...
AIEEEE!
...is awful to behold.
IT'S OVER, ZEMO!
K-K-K
SHRAAAAK-K
MY PETS... HELP ME! PLEASE!
RRRIPPP
PLEEEASE!!


YOU SAID IT YOURSELF, ZEMO-- THERE'S A BRAIN-WAVE PATTERN COMMON TO ALL OF US, LINKS IN A CHAIN.
WHY WON'T YOU HELP ME?
WHEN I BROKE FREE OF YOUR CONTROL ...MY FREEDOM RIPPLED OUT... INTO THE OTHERS.
THEY'RE NOT YOUR PUPPETS ANYMORE.
I BEG YOU... HAVE MERCY ON ME!
HAVE MERCY!
SURE. I'LL SHOW YOU MERCY. THE SAME MERCY YOU SHOWED--
--WHEN YOU MADE ME INTO THIS.
I tried to scream out-- "Edward, no... don't!"-- but I couldn't find my voice. A part of me (feed Norma. Wash Norma)...
...that frightened resentful little girl (put Norma to bed)... wanted Zemo dead as much as Vermin did.
I'M GONNA EAT YOU UP, ZEMO!
His awful scarred face seemed to mirror all the shame and guilt of my past (change the sheets. Iron the clothes)...
Maybe, I thought, if that mirror was smashed, once and for all (cook the meals. Pay the bills)...
EATYOU- EATYOU- EATYOU!
...I'd be free, too.

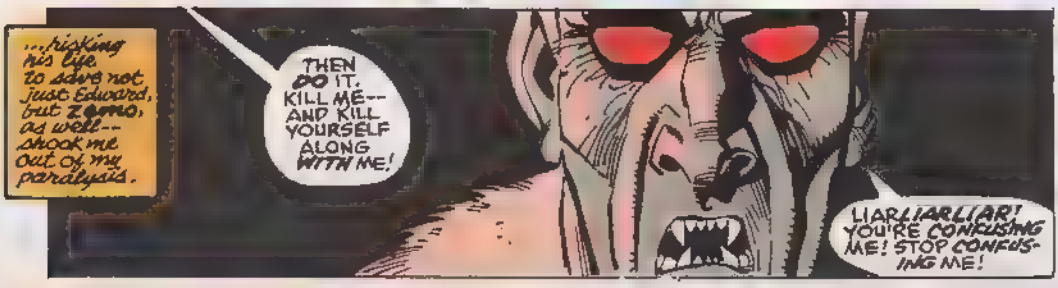

Then...
EDWARD-- LET ME DO THIS! LET ME TAKE ZEMO IN AND--
SPIDER-MAN.. I-I'M BEGGING YOU . DON'T--
--TRY TO STOP ME!
SHHHKKKKK
KOOOM!
STOP IT!
I'M GONNA KILL ZEMO! GONNA SLICE 'N' DICE 'N' SUCK ON HIS BONES!
TOOOM!
AND I SWEAR--IF YOU GET IN MY WAY AGAIN--
YOU'LL BE NEXT!
KRAK!

E-E-E--
IT'S OVER... HERR BARON.
SPIDER-MAN CAN'T HELP YOU.
NOBODY CAN.
I'M GONNA DO IT SLOW. PIECE BY PIECE. AND YOU'RE GONNA FEEL IT ALL--
E-E-E--
EVERY
LITTLE
BITE.
EDWARD!
...everything changed.

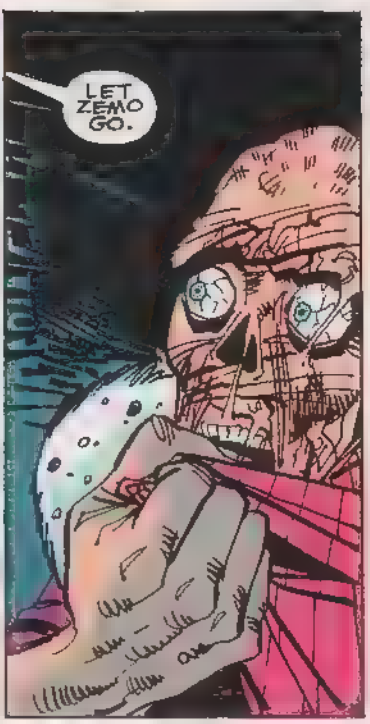
EDWARD--YOU CAN'T.
HUH?!
Where did I find my voice?

YOU CAN'T!
Where did I find the words?

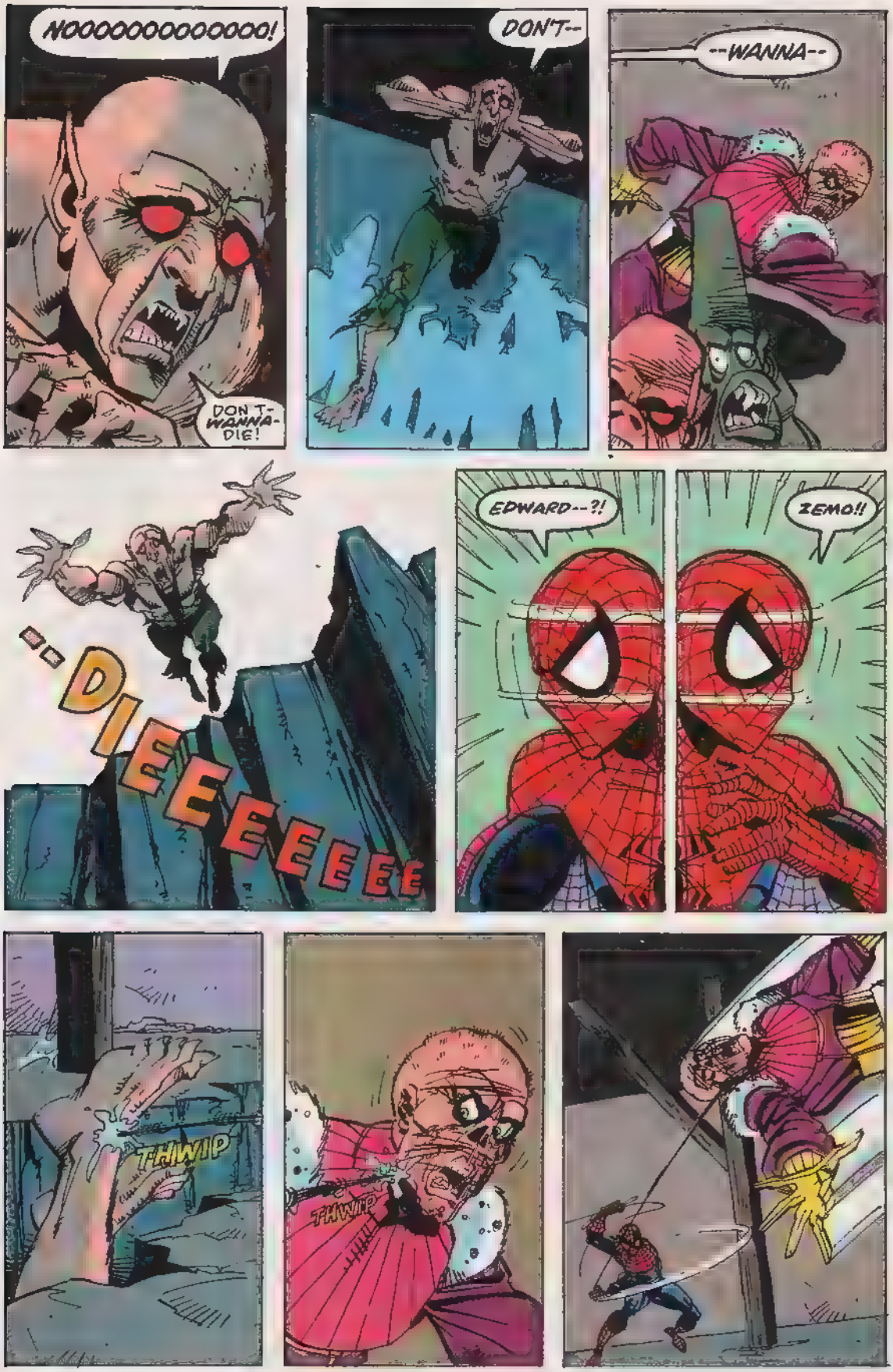
BEFORE... WHEN VERMIN DID THIS... YOU WEREN'T AWARE. YOU WEREN'T IN CONTROL. BUT, NOW--
--IF YOU CONSCIOUSLY ALLOW HIM TO COMMIT SUCH AN UNSPEAKABLE ACT... HE'LL HAVE WON. YOU'LL DIE, EDWARD ...AND VERMIN--
VERMIN WILL LIVE FOREVER.
BACK OFF--OR I'LL KILL YOU, YOU HEAR ME? I'LL KILL YOU!
It was Spider-Man, I think. Watching him--bloody and battered as he was...

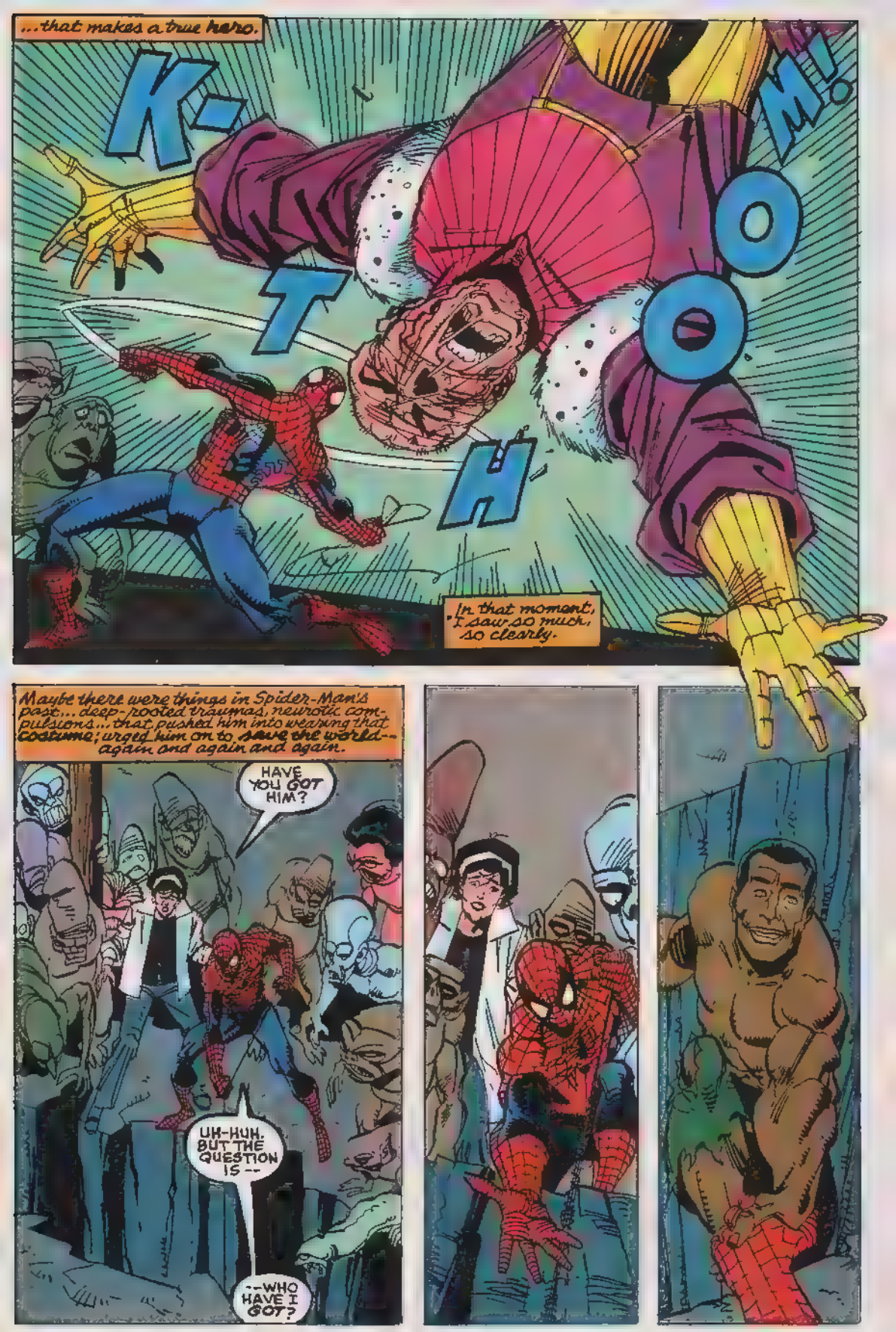

...risking his life to save not just Edward, but Zemo, as well--shook me out of my paralysis.
THEN DO IT. KILL ME--AND KILL YOURSELF ALONG WITH ME!
LIAR! LIAR! LIAR! YOU'RE CONFUSING ME! STOP CONFUSING ME!

His power was impressive, but not half so impressive as his compassion. It's the latter quality, I think...
I'M TELLING YOU THE TRUTH.


LET ZEMO GO.

LET VERMIN DIE.


NOOOOOOOOOOOOO!
DON'T-WANNA-DIE!
DON'T--
--WANNA--
--DIEEEEEEEE
EDWARD--?!
ZEMO!!
THWIP
THWIP


...that makes a true hero.
K-
T
H
O
O
M!
In that moment, I saw so much, so clearly.
Maybe there were things in Spider-Man's past... deep-rooted traumas, neurotic compulsions... that pushed him into wearing that costume; urged him on to save the world--again and again and again.
HAVE YOU GOT HIM?
UH-HUH. BUT THE QUESTION IS --
--WHO HAVE I GOT?

But does that, I wondered, make him any less a hero?
YOU... OKAY, ED?
Does that make any of us less than we are?
VERMIN... VERMIN'S GONE.
HE'S DEAD.
If the place our traumas ultimately lead us to is one of genuine compassion...
MAY HE REST IN PEACE.
...who's to say that isn't exactly where God intended us to be...
SO... NOW WHAT?
I HAVE TO GIVE MYSELF UP. STAND TRIAL FOR VERMIN'S CRIMES.
BUT YOU WEREN'T RESPONSIBLE FOR--
IF I'M EVER GOING TO BE ABLE TO LIVE WITH... WHAT I'VE BEEN... I'VE GOT TO LET THE LAW DECIDE WHO'S RESPONSIBLE.
AND US...?
WHAT... BECOMES... OF... US?
I THINK I'VE GOT A FEW IDEAS.
... all along?

So I write now to you, Mother... and to you, my poor sweet Norma (I suppose I've been writing this account for you two all along)... to thank you for all you gave me. For better or for worse, everything we endured together...
...made me who I am today. And, if there's one thing I learned that night, it's that who I am...
...is a hero.
Oh, maybe I can't spin webs or climb walls; maybe I can't punch out the bad guys...
...but, I'm doing all right.
I'm fighting the good fight the best way I know how. And I'm going to keep fighting till the day I die. After all...
...Spider-Man can't save the world alone.

Love... Ashley.
ASHLEY...?
YES, EDWARD?
REED RICHARDS IS HERE, AND HE'S GOT THAT EQUIPMENT WE REQUESTED FROM S.H.I.E.L.D.
YOU SOUND A LITTLE EXCITED.
HOW CAN I NOT BE? WE'RE MAKING SUCH INCREDIBLE PROGRESS WITH THE MUTATES.
EVERY DAY WE'RE GETTING CLOSER TO A FINAL CURE.
WELL, THEN, LET'S GET TO WORK.
DID REED HAVE ANY NEWS ABOUT YOUR CASE?
YES! HE SPOKE TO MATT MURDOCK THIS MORNING--
AND...?
MURDOCK'S AGREED TO TAKE ME ON AS A CLIENT!
THEN I'D SAY YOU'RE IN VERY GOOD HANDS.
YOU ASK ME, I'VE BEEN IN GOOD HANDS--
--ALL ALONG.
KLIK
THE END
NEXT:
SPIDEY AND THE X-MEN
'NUFF SAID!

SPECTACULAR SPIDER-MAIL

% MARVEL COMICS GROUP
387 Park Avenue South
New York, New York 10016

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Attention correspondents: All letters considered for publication must include your name and address, though we will withhold that information upon request.

Dear Crew,

Hello, J.M. DeMatteis! I have always loved your writing, and my welcome to you to these pages is long overdue! Your sense of drama, and tight weaving together of plots in your story arcs are beautiful to behold.

Onto "Funeral Arrangements", excellent all the away around. J.M. kept us hopping with this one.

We think the Vulture's going to let bygone's be bygones? This series was an excellent portrayal of the Vulture, probably the best ever done, at least in my humble opinion!

But even with that, though, the Vulture was overshadowed by the great portrayal of Aunt May. From her brave facing of the Vulture when he first appears, to her fiery anger at him when he seeks forgiveness for killing Nathan, to her impassioned and courageous visit to the Vulture in prison, this woman shined forth with her strengths. Besides, I can't tell you how long it's been since I've seen good interplay between Peter and his Aunt, and the scene of them hugging, after Aunt May confesses to having lost so much, and feeling dead inside moved me to tears. Sal's fading out on that scene drove it home! We really see the powerful love between these two in these issues.

One for the WHAT IF... department. What if the Vulture had unmasked Spider-Man and learned his true identity? It was ironic that he had sworn to kill one identity of the same man he had sworn to protect. To be honest, I half expected Vulture to rip Spidey's mask off in that final battle, and then have to deal with the dilemma that would pose, then die before he could reveal the secret! But, J.M. kept me guessing. Still, its an interesting question. Would Vulture still have killed Spider-Man or spared May's nephew?

C. Edward Sellner
3336 Lockheed Blvd. #202
Alexandria, VA 22306

We thought the interaction between Peter and his gun-toting aunt was pretty strong stuff, too, C. Edward. And we wouldn't be surprised if the WHAT IF...?! Department isn't already hard at work on their version of what could have happened at that oh-so-crucial juncture.

Dear Spectacular Spidey-ers,

I've just finished #186 and #187, and I have to admit that, at first, I was not too excited at seeing the Vulture on the cover--an old guy with a halfway goofy costume. But, the story has proven me wrong. The Vulture seeking Aunt May's forgiveness? Who would've guessed? I love it. The cancer bit and especially the semi-kindness the Vulture shows Peter is terrific. Irony at its best.

Until Spidey retires and buys a condo in Florida, Make Mine Marvel!

Glen Kenner
2401 W. Broadway
Columbia, MO 65203

Dear Spider-rific Ones,

Wow! After reading SPECTACULAR #186, I had made up my mind that the "Funeral Arrangements" storyline was going to be just another boring battle with the Vulture, a villain who has never seemed that threatening to me.

Well, I was wrong! Issue #187 was anything but boring! J.M. is a master of characterization. Too many writers seem to forget the history of the characters about whom they write. The impact that Nathan's death had on the Vulture was very realistic (although it seems clear that ol' Vulchie doesn't have a firm grip on all his marbles). Peter's paranoid suspicion that Harry had told the Vulture his secret identity was superb.

Keep up the good work!

John Warren
1151 Emerald Road
Charleston, WV 25314

Nope, the ol' Vulch didn't quite have the firmest of grips on all his marbles, but did he ever?

Dear Spectacular Spider Mail,

I am enjoying reading the writing of J.M. DeMatteis very much. He has a very special touch for making characters that feel much more human. Who would have thought that the Vulture would come to May Parker asking for forgiveness. Also, I love the scene where May comes down the stairs with the gun. Finally, a hard-edged May Parker, showing her toughness that we have all known about for years.

I had not been buying SPECTACULAR for a while, but with the return of DeMatteis I have started to pick it up again. This storyline is great and I am looking forward to seeing a few more like this from his pen.

Jonathan Petter
3542 Meier St.
Los Angeles, CA 90066

Who would have thought that the Vulture would come to May Parker asking for forgiveness? Why, Jonathan...haven't you heard Marvel's motto of the moment? Always expect the unexpected!

Dear Danny and Eric,

Part 2 of "Funeral Arrangements" was another well written story in the life of everyone's favorite web-slinger. While some readers may seem upset over the death of the Vulture because he is the first real original super-villain that Spidey faced, I feel this is a logical and necessary move.

Why, you ask? With the 30th anniversary of Spider-Man just around the corner, the Vulture has been around for a long time. Although not as many years have passed by in the world of Spider-Man (otherwise Aunt May would be nearing 100!), the Vulture has aged several years since he was first introduced. Because he was an old man then, he is a very old man now and logically should be eventually dying of something. Everyone has to go sometime, and I'm glad the Vulture is getting the story he deserves while he makes his exit.

Poor MJ. She seems to be going through one trauma after another these days. It's a wonder she hasn't left Peter or suffered a nervous breakdown by now. Perhaps when this is all over Peter will do something very special to repay MJ for all the support she has given him over the years. Within the past few years, she has overtaken Aunt May as the #1 supporting character in Spider-Man's life, and it would kill both Peter and me for MJ to leave Spider-Man's life.

James Evans
6621 Sutton Road
Madison, WI 53711

Mary Jane's not going anywhere, James. She signed up for the long haul with Peter and knew it wasn't going to be a picnic having a super hero for a husband. But, as you can see by her unfortunate new smoking habit, being Spider-Man's wife *is* taking a toll. And it's only gonna get harder. Stick around.

Dear Spectacular Spider- Mail,

I just read SPECTACULAR #187 and had to write in and thank you for making SPIDER-MAN interesting again. I hate to see the Vulture die, but I love the story. The old villains aren't used enough (i.e. the Green Goblin and the Vulture), and it's great to see them battling Spidey again. I'm also happy to see Aunt May become involved again. For once, a modern Spider-Man story has been written that incorporates all the stuff that made the old stories great. We don't need alien costumes on two or three different impersonators, or psychopathic vigilantes wielding automatic weapons to make a good Spider-Man story. What we need is an insecure guy with real problems that we can relate to, fighting cool, but simple, villains like the Scorpion or Mysterio (hint, hint). Luckily, it seems like someone else has seen things my way. Thanks for the wonderful reading. I hope it continues in the future.

Art Durband
Buffalo Grove, IL

An insecure guy with real problems that you can relate to, fighting cool, but simple, villains? Sounds like classic, yet modern, Spider-Man stuff to us!